

# APH SLATE

Newsletter

Summer, 1991



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## APH Slate Editors:

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Editor

Paula Penrod,  
Assistant Editor

*He turn'd him right and  
round about  
Upon the Irish shore,  
And gae his bridle reins a shake,  
With adieu for evermore...*

*Robert Burns*



## Farewell Mac:

### APH Mourns Loss of Ralph McCracken

Ralph E. "Mac" McCracken, Editor for the American Printing House for the Blind and a leading expert in braille, died on August 17th at his home in Louisville, Kentucky. McCracken died at age 65 after fighting a long and courageous battle with cancer.

Mac had been involved with braille since 1959 when he began teaching at Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children in Pittsburgh. In 1965, he became Assistant Editor/Field Representative at the American Printing House for the Blind. In 1972, Mac was promoted to Editor for APH.

In 1990 the Library of Congress presented a special award to Mac for his contribution to braille readers all over the world. Mac was instrumental in refining the various braille codes,

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AMERICAN PRINTING HOUSE FOR THE BLIND, INC.

# NEW PRODUCTS

## Revised Speech Synthesis Systems for Apple Computers Available

APH announces the availability of the **Echo® II with *TEXTALKER*™** and the **Echo II with *Textalker-gs***, two easy-to-use speech synthesis systems designed for Apple® computers. Street Electronics Corporation recently updated the Echo synthesizer hardware. Due to the changes, APH is no longer able to modify the Echo speaker box to add a rate of speech knob; therefore, the **Echo Commander** has been discontinued. APH is reintroducing the Echo synthesizer in two new packages, described below.



### Echo II with *TEXTALKER*

**Echo II with *TEXTALKER*** is a speech synthesis system intended for users of the Apple II+ and //e computers.

#### Echo II Hardware:

The **Echo II** hardware includes:

- ▼ An interface card which plugs into one of the card slots inside the computer

- ▼ An external speaker box which includes a knob control for volume, a 1/8 inch jack for headphones, and a cable for connection to the interface card
- ▼ Installation instructions in regular type and braille

#### *TEXTALKER* Software:

***TEXTALKER*** operates in the background, allowing many public domain and non-copy-protected programs to talk. The pitch, volume, rate of speech, punctuation spoken, and other characteristics of the speech can be controlled from the keyboard. ***TEXTALKER*** also includes many helpful screen review functions.

#### Requirements to Use:

**Echo II with *TEXTALKER*** should be used on an Apple II+ or //e computer with at least 64K of RAM for the *DOS 3.3* version, 128K of RAM for the *ProDOS*® version.



### Echo II with *Textalker-gs*

**Echo II with *Textalker-gs*** is a speech synthesis system designed especially for users of the Apple IIGS® computer. It



consists of the **Echo II** hardware and a version of **TEXTALKER** that gives speech to a wide range of software, *including many copy-protected programs!*

### **Echo II Hardware:**

The **Echo II** hardware included with this package is the same as that shipped with the **Echo II** with **TEXTALKER**.

### **Textalker-gs Software:**

As with **TEXTALKER**, *Textalker-gs* operates in the background, giving speech to many application programs. In addition to allowing public domain and noncopy-protected software to talk, *Textalker-gs* gives a voice to many copy-protected programs.

### **Requirements to Use:**

**Echo II** with *Textalker-gs* is designed for Apple II GS computers with at least 512K of RAM and a 3 1/2 inch disk drive.

### **Echo II with TEXTALKER:**

Catalog no. 1-07212-00, price \$131.13.

### **Echo II with Textalker-gs:**

Catalog no. 1-07213-00, price \$144.13. 🔍

## **New Tractor-Feed Braille Paper**

Three new variations of tractor-feed braille paper are now available from APH. This paper is for use with computer-driven braille embossing devices. All APH tractor-feed braille paper is white, has a smooth surface, and has tractor-feed holes that may be torn off.



### **White Fanfold Tractor-Feed Braille Transcribing Paper, 80 Pound, 19-Ring Punch**

This 11 1/2 x 11 inch paper is designed for 19-ring braille notebooks, such as APH's **Krebs' Binder** or the **Loose Leaf Notebook**. This paper is an 80 pound weight, which is thinner than the 100 pound paper. Each package contains 1000 sheets.

**White Fanfold Tractor-Feed Paper, 80 Pound, 19-Ring Punch:** Catalog no. 1-04141-00, price \$41.31.

### **White Fanfold Tractor-Feed Braille Transcribing Paper, Nonpunched**

APH now offers nonpunched white fanfold tractor-feed braille transcribing paper in 80 pound and 100 pound weights. Each package of the 11 1/2 x 11 inch paper contains 1000 sheets.

### **White Fanfold Tractor-Feed Paper, Nonpunched:**

**80 Pound,** Catalog no. 1-04142-00, price \$41.31.

**100 Pound,** Catalog no. 1-04139-00, price \$41.31. 🔍

# **The People Behind the Products: Phyllis Williams**



**Phyllis Williams** of the APH Business Office loves families—so much so that she has two of them. Phyllis not only enjoys her own family, but her APH family as well.

A Kentucky native, Phyllis has worked at APH for 28 years. Her mother and all of her brothers and sisters live in Louisville. Her family gets together quite often and everyone is very close. Phyllis has two daughters and two granddaughters. When asked what her hobbies are, she replied without hesitation: “my basic hobby right now is my grandkids.” Then she admitted that she is also a sports fan. Phyllis works in the community by volunteering as an Emergency Medical Technician at a local hospital.

## **When did you join APH?**

I came to the Printing House in 1963, fresh out of high school. Jane Kent was in charge of the Business Office at that time. My first job was typing invoices. Very soon a position came open in the cost area and I transferred over there. In the '70s I

went into handling repairs, writing the paperwork for repaired equipment. I helped customers, explaining what needed to be done and what the work would cost.

In the early '80s I became the Cost Coordinator. What I do is determine prices on all contract bids and special materials for

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**“My main priority is helping to keep our prices as low as we can.”**

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other agencies. I make sure that our estimates are accurate and also keep data on the jobs so that if we get a similar contract job in the future, we will be able to produce a competitive bid.

## **What are your other duties?**

After a time I was put in charge of the cost area, which includes pricing all products



manufactured at the Printing House. I'm also the direct contact person with some customers. I communicate with them, ironing out problems.

About two years ago I was assigned the shipping area as well—my title now is the Cost/Inventory Manager. The shipping area presents different challenges. For instance, some publications must be shipped to many different locations so sometimes we are working from four or five mailing lists at once. Another big job duty in shipping is the annual inventory. I'm in charge of finished goods and raw materials inventory.

### **What are the goals for your area?**

My main priority is helping to keep our prices as low as we can. We make a great effort to determine the true cost of an item; for instance, we're careful to reflect the true labor cost that goes into a product.

We do studies to provide various APH departments with cost data. For example, we might want to know how the APH-DOTS program is running, what it's costing us. We create quite a number of spreadsheets with this type of information.

### **What tasks challenge you the most?**

Fifty percent of my job is problem-solving. I always try to work through problems with a procedure by getting in there and doing it myself. For instance, with inventory I've gotten into the shelves myself to check products so I could see what problems the inventory takers have.

I've realized that it's pretty hard standing on a step ladder in the dark with a clipboard, a pencil, and a flashlight trying to count something. You have to find these things out first hand.

APH continues to add desktop computers. It's a challenge for me to learn all the software involved. The Printing House sends me to school, but you have to dig out a lot yourself. The new mainframe computer system will be a huge challenge

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**“I really like working with the people here—it's like a big family.”**

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to learn and implement. We're all working together to tie the different departments in for better communications.

### **Is there something that you find especially rewarding about your job?**

I do enjoy costing, the math part. It's a very rewarding thing to dig for a problem and then find it. I really like working with the people here—it's like a big family. I'm very proud to tell people that I work for the Printing House. I'm a family-oriented person—I know what it's like to have a child who needs materials for school. I want to do things that help fill that need. 🐞

## New Faces at APH: Campana and Bice Set High Goals

**Phyllis Campana** recently joined APH as Braille Division Manager. She comes to APH from National Braille Press (NBP), where she served as Director of Operations. Prior to that, she supervised the production of braille textbooks by volunteers at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind.

Excited about her new challenge, Phyllis commented, "My major goal here is to make sure that braille is produced in the fastest, most efficient way. I want us to set the standard on how braille is produced."

The move to Louisville has created other challenges for Phyllis. Her husband David remains in Boston where he is employed as a computer programmer. He plans to join her next summer.

**David Bice** brought his expertise to APH in June. He is serving as Publisher Liaison, which entails coordinating APH efforts with major textbook publishers.

Prior to his arrival, David was director of the educational division of a regional publisher in Missouri. Earlier in his career, he taught social studies, Spanish, and

worked with children with behavioral disorders. Dissatisfied with the textbooks he was using in the classroom, he was encouraged by his co-workers to write new ones. He then went on to au-

thor 15 books, including social studies texts and children's books.

When asked what he wants to accomplish at APH, David quickly responded, "I want braille to be available on demand. I know that it sounds lofty at this point, but it is achievable through technology and cooperation. It is discrimination for a blind child not to have his textbooks on the first day of school. In essence, the student must be our goal."

David is joined in Louisville by his wife, Alice. 🔑





## Beep...Beep...Beep... KA-BOOM!!!

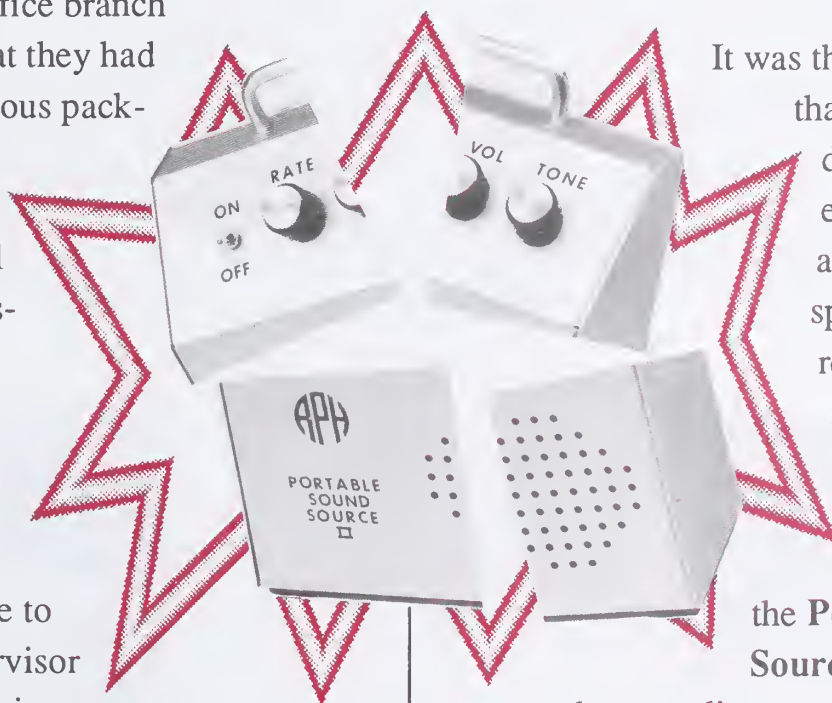
The new APH fiscal year began on July 1; little did we realize that it would “ring in” or rather, “blast in” with such excitement!

Around 10:00 a.m. on July 1, Carl Powell, APH Postal Liaison, received a call from a Louisville post office branch informing him that they had received a suspicious package addressed to APH. The postal manager told Carl that while processing the package, workers noticed that it was making a strange noise. Carl referred the message to Lou Tingle, Supervisor of Electronic Repairs.

Lou, accompanied by Gene Utley, APH’s Maintenance Division Manager, rushed to the post office and on arrival found that the building had been evacuated, along with the adjoining business! The postal manager met them and immediately directed them to the back parking lot.

A crowd of workers, spectators, police, and the *bomb squad* had gathered in the

back lot. It seems that the postal manager had feared the package contained an explosive device, had tossed it into a dumpster, and had then notified the authorities. The bomb squad, attired in their protective gear, were in the process of applying a *detonating charge* to the package when Lou and Gene arrived. The charge was activated...Beep...Beep...Beep...Beep... KA-BOOM!!!



It was then discovered that the package didn’t contain an explosive device at all. On inspecting the remains, it was revealed that the package contained an APH product called the **Portable Sound Source II**, which

produces auditory cues by means of pulsing tones. It seems that Alice Post, an APH Ex Officio Trustee from Illinois, was returning the unit to the Printing House for repair. Apparently, the on/off switch had been shifted to the “on” position during shipping, creating the mysterious beep and consequently all the excitement.

Thank you, Alice, for starting our year out right—it was a real blast! 🦋

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especially the textbook code. He was appointed to serve on the prestigious Braille Authority of North America and

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**“Mac was widely respected...for his diligence in helping blind students become independent adults.”**

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was a U.S. delegate to the International Conferences on English Literary Braille held in 1982 and 1988. In addition, Mac

was an active member of the National Braille Association and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Mac was a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was an Army veteran of World War II who was awarded the Purple Heart for a wound received in the Pacific Theater. Mac began his teaching career at Bethel Park Junior High School in Pennsylvania.

Mac was widely respected for his unflagging dedication to improving the braille code and for his diligence in helping blind students become independent

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Mac edits a braille book with Marjorie Hooper (seated) and Maxine Floden, circa 1968.



Mac “clowning” with Francie Knott, Halloween, 1990.



In 1990 Mac received a lifetime achievement award from Frank Kurt Cylke of the Library of Congress.





# **MAC:**

## **In the Words of Some of His Friends**

compiled by Paula Penrod

Maxine Floden, Stereograph Supervisor, remembers the first words Ralph McCracken said to her. "He had come to the Printing House for a job interview. I'll never forget when he walked into Miss Hooper's office (the former Editor). He looked around and then turned to me and asked, 'Do you have an aspirin?'" Maxine served under Mac as the stereograph supervisor. "Mr. McCracken and I worked very closely," commented Maxine. "We got along well. I have a lot of respect for Mr. McCracken—he always listened to what you had to say, even if he didn't agree with you. In many ways he was like a father to me. I could talk to him about anything."



"I once attended a funeral service where the message was that you live on through the affect you've had on others. Both directly and indirectly, Mac's life has left its mark," said June Morris, Executive Vice-President. "Although known by many as 'Mr. Braille,' I've had the privilege of knowing him in many other capacities. His knowledge of the printing industry was just as comprehensive as his knowledge of braille. His formidable knowledge of braille enabled him to broker disputes regarding the code and to help people who knew they could find answers by merely calling Mac.

"On the personal side, I was one of his friends with whom he shared treasured treats, such as oysters stuffed with jalapeno peppers—at 8:00 a.m. yet! And, I shared an occasional afternoon at Churchill Downs with Mac and his attractive wife, Dell. Mac was one of the good ones—he accomplished a pleasing balance between his professional life and his personal life. What a privilege and pleasure it has been for me to have known this delightful person. Mac will live long through the influence he's had upon so many others."

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John Siems worked with Mac as the Assistant Manager of Data Processing during the early stages of computerized braille translation. “Mr. McCracken was our authority for keeping the work within the guidelines of braille codes and contract specifications. My feeling is that Mr. McCracken was a person you could easily underestimate because he was honest and unassuming, and he had a lot of knowledge you might not see on the surface,” added Siems. “He was a good editor because he possessed a broad range of knowledge in various fields of education.”



“The attribute I remember most about Mr. McCracken was his diligence to his work,” said Pat Packer, who served as his secretary and administrative assistant for 17 years. She also noted that he was a true family man. “Whenever he was going to be away from the office he would say, ‘When the Boss calls, I want to be found.’ He made it clear that he was referring to his wife, not the president of the company.”



Confirming the sentiments of her fellow employees, Print Proofreader Mary Cissell added, “Mac was a very caring person. He was the type you could always count on to be there. He was sincere and completely honest—if he was happy you knew it, and if he was mad you knew it! You wanted to work for him because he made you feel like you really were important and meant something to him and the department. I don’t want it to sound like he was all work and no play. He loved jokes! He loved to tell them and he always had time to listen to a good one. He was so much fun to be around.”



Schuelah Hoppes of the Data Processing Department remembers Mac as someone who never lacked in humor. “We were always telling jokes—we would argue about the books, but we didn’t mean anything by it. It was our way of kidding and having a good time while we did our work,” commented Schuelah. She remembers one particular incident about ten years ago when she got mad and exclaimed, “I’m going to quit this place, I’m tired of it!” Mac responded, “Oh no, you can’t do that—I can’t talk to anybody around here the way I talk to you.”

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Carl Powell, Postal Liaison, shared some moments with Mac away from the Printing House. “We became friends about two years ago when we discovered that we were affiliated with the same Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post. He was dedicated to the cause of veterans and was very vital to the VFW. Frankly, I found the guy to be relaxing and refreshing. He will certainly be missed!”



“Mac was one of the strongest and most courageous men I’ve ever known,” commented Jackie Oliver, Braille Press Supervisor. “Professionally, his dedication was beyond words—not only to the company, but to his employees and supervisors as well. I’ll always treasure my memories of the side of Mac I saw during his illness. He would come into work when most people would have given up. After work, several of us would take turns taking him home. It was during those trips that I realized how kind and compassionate he really was. He would be very exhausted, but he always inquired about my family and expressed his appreciation for the things you did for him. It was a sad but very warm experience, one that will be with me for a long time. Cancer broke him physically, but never, never broke his spirit.”



“You want me to quote Mac? That’s risky business...Oh, I see, you want a quote *about* Mac! Now that’s lots safer,” said Mary Nelle McLennan, Director of the Department of Educational and Advisory Services. “Despite his quiet, tough exterior, Mac was a cream puff at heart. He was that special kind of leader who saw the people he worked with as persons first and as employees second. We felt his touch both professionally and personally. With typical Mac humor, he would leave silly ‘found’ objects in my office—a highway reflector, a tile from a subway men’s room, a dipstick, to name only a few. Along with these ‘gifts,’ he would scribble a note: *‘I wuz here. Where wuz you?’* In this note lies an allegory—Mac left us many real gifts and all of us who worked with him know well where he was. He believed in each person’s dignity and he supported us in our ideas and efforts. He gave us his quiet talents, his knowledge, his jokes, and, perhaps most importantly, his time and himself...”

*Yes, Mac ‘wuz here’ and we are richer for it.”*

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adults. Those who worked with Mac will remember him for his tireless efforts to create special educational materials for blind students, for his devotion to his family, and for his mischievous sense of humor.

Mac's survivors include his wife, the former Della M. LeJeune; his daughter, Joyce McCoy; three sons, Danny, Keith, and Jeff McCracken; two brothers, Donald and Craig McCracken; a sister, Margaret Watters; and seven grandchildren.

The family requests that memorial donation checks be made out to one of the following: the Cancer Aid and Research Fund, the Hospice of Louisville Fund, or the APH-CARL Fund. Please note on the check that the gift is in memory of Ralph McCracken. If you wish to send a memorial gift, please mail it to:

Della McCracken  
8609 Perry Road  
Louisville, KY 40222. 📧

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